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**Citation for published version:**

McGeown, H, McKechnie, A, McKirdy, J, Owens, D, Stanfield, A & Johnstone, E 2017, 'Determinants of Adult Outcome in Adolescents with Educational Difficulties', A celebration of the work of the Salvesen Mindroom Centre, Edinburgh, United Kingdom, 14/02/17.

**Link:**

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**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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# Determinants of Adult Outcome in Adolescents with Educational Difficulties



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## Introduction

Considerable heterogeneity in outcome exists for adolescents receiving educational assistance, with some children showing relatively good outcome while others show more difficulties.

Little is known about the factors which predict outcome in this group; establishing these could identify those at greatest risk for poor outcome and identify targets for intervention.

## Methods

Participants were recruited from schools across Scotland as part of a large study to examine mental health in adolescents receiving special education

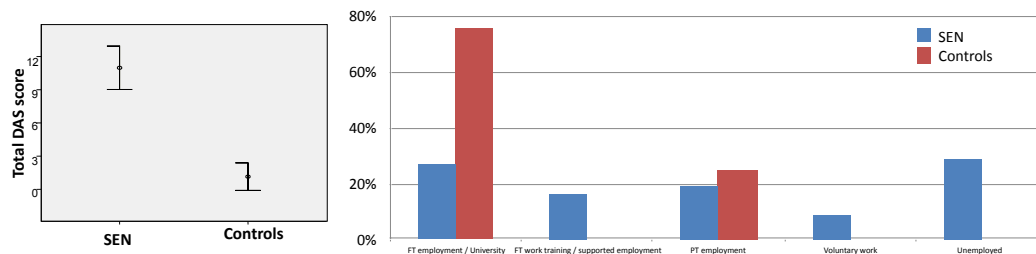
Baseline assessments conducted included measures of IQ, autistic traits, the level of difficult behaviours and psychiatric symptoms.

Six years after the baseline assessment, participants were recontacted and the World Health Organisation Disability Assessment Schedule (WHO-DAS) was completed. Responses on the WHO-DAS were summed to give a total outcome score for each child.

63 people receiving special education and 8 controls were assessed at both timepoints.

The mean age at baseline was 16 years old; at follow-up it was 22 years old. Mean IQ was 75.

## Overall Outcome

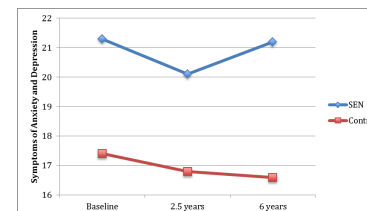
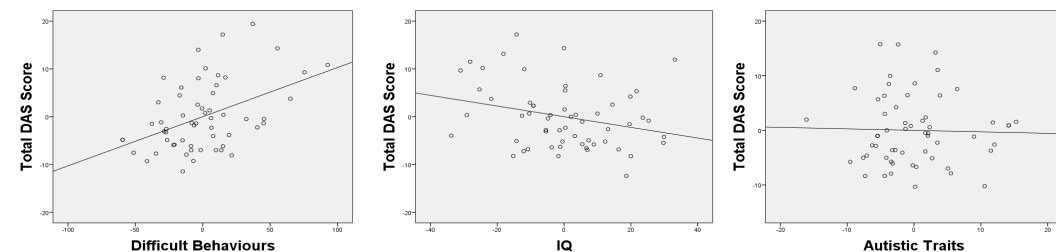


Outcome at 22 years is worse for those who had received special educational assistance. WHO-DAS of participants ( $M=11.0$ ,  $SD=7.5$ ) and controls ( $M=1.1$ ,  $SD=1.3$ );  $t(63)=3.46$ ,  $p=0.001$ . Over 60% of people who had received special education were in some form of employment in early adulthood. Controls were more likely to be in employment than those who had received educational assistance.

## What Predicted Outcome?

The strongest predictor of future outcome was the level of difficult behaviour in adolescence.

IQ score also significantly predicted outcome, but less so than behaviour, whereas autistic traits had no effect on future outcome once IQ and behaviour were accounted for.



The group who received special education also had high levels of anxiety and depression throughout the study, despite very few being formally treated for these.

The role of these potentially treatable conditions in determining outcome is also likely to be important.

## Conclusions

Interventions targeting behaviour may be most effective at improving outcome for people receiving special education.

Potentially treatable psychiatric symptoms are unrecognised in this group; future research will examine their role in determining outcome.

## Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks are given to all research participants without whom such research would not be possible.

Thank you also to our funders and other supporters.

